Department of Administration
Division of Public Works
Facilities Services

Notes and Suggestions
for Organizing a VIDEOCONFERENCE
in the Capitol Complex

Organizing a videoconference requires a different approach than that used for traditional meetings. Multiple site videoconferences can be disastrous if you don't plan ahead. This information sheet is provided to increase your understanding of the unique aspects of videoconferencing and to help you organize a successful event.

SITE FACILITATORS

Designate a Facilitator for each location. The Facilitator should be a person who will be present before, during, and after the event. In addition to individual Site Facilitators, there should be a single person at one site who will act as the Primary Facilitator for the entire event. This person will introduce speakers, address other sites, and maintain the flow of the event.

ROOM LAYOUT

Plan to spend 15 minutes in the conference room one week before the scheduled videoconference. While you are there, consider the arrangement of seating you would like for the event. Where should speaker(s) or presenter(s) be seated? How many attendees will be present? Will attendees actively participate or just watch? Consider the location of the camera - do you want the audience to be on camera or just the presenter(s)?

It may be helpful to arrange a time to meet with the Site Technician prior to the event. The technician will know what works and what doesn't and may be able to make suggestions that help your event run more smoothly. Before meeting with the technician, make a list of what you already know – the number of presenters, audience size, multimedia presentations to be used, room setup and seating requirements, etc.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

If your event involves a panel of speakers, designate a single spot where each person will stand to speak when it is his or her turn. For example, position a lectern between two tables. The panel members, seated at the table, can stand and move to the lectern when it is their turn to speak.

Keep in mind that audience members at all videoconference sites want to see and hear each speaker clearly. This is particulary critical for hearing-impaired participants who may read lips. By using the setup suggested above, speakers can be kept on camera and can be seen and heard by all audience members. Some speakers have a tendency to move around while speaking. While this is not troublesome for attendees in the same room, it complicates the participation of audience members at other sites who are watching and listening via a camera and monitor. For this reason, speakers should be instructed to avoid moving from the lectern as they speak.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIODS

Question and answer (Q&A) periods between multiple sites should be organized carefully to prevent confusion. An excellent method is to ask all attendees to write their questions on a 3x5 notecard (one question per card) and submit the cards to the Site Facilitator during the event. When the Q&A period begins, the Primary Facilitator should address each site in sequence and have the Facilitator at that site read two or three questions. If you don't limit the number of questions from each site, you can expect the Q&A period to take *much* longer than planned. Because of this, it is STRONGLY recommended that you strictly maintain a limit. Experience shows again and again that "one more quick question," is almost never just one, nor very quick.

You will also want to develop a plan to address questions that don't get answered during the event. Posting all the questions, with answers, on a website is a great way to do this. A website that includes a message board allows attendees to ask follow-up questions and to engage in continued discussion of the topic.

If you would rather have attendees ask questions themselves, set up a lectern at each site where each person can stand and ask his or her question in turn. This requires that a microphone be set up so that all sites can hear all questions. Using this method also allows camera to focus on the questioner at the lectern.

NOTE: Due to the nature of audiovisual data transmissions, there is a slight audio delay when sites are conversing with one another. Similar to what you see when a news anchor is speaking to an "on-site" reporter, it takes a couple of seconds for the signal to reach its destination. Because of this, you should pause for 2 or 3 seconds after you THINK the other person has finished speaking and before you begin responding.

SEATING

To encourage more active participation, and to ensure that everyone can hear the proceedings, it is recommended that attendees sit close to the front of the room. One of the best ways to do this is to set up only half as many chairs as you think will be needed. Those who arrive first will fill up the front section; and more chairs can be added to the back as necessary. It is also helpful to have the Site Facilitator seat people.

PRINTED MATERIALS AND MULTIMEDIA

Printed materials and multimedia (PowerPoint presentations, slides, overheads, etc.) are notoriously difficult for distant sites to see. In the best scenario, they should be available in printed form to all attendees PRIOR to the event.

If you plan to broadcast multimedia information during the event, it must be designed with a videoconference in mind. Fonts must be VERY LARGE – people might be sitting as much as 50 feet away from a video monitor during the event and will not be able to read text that seems very large on your computer screen. Use font sizes no less than 50 to be sure the message is readable from a distance. At this size, 6 or 7 words will fit on each screen; as such, the slides will merely be highlights of discussion.

NOTE: Be sure to discuss the multimedia formats you will need to use with your Site Technician before the event! Broadcasting some multimedia formats requires resources and equipment that may not be standard in every videoconferencing facility. If you bring a multimedia item to the event that you have not previously confirmed with the technician, you may be unable to use it.

CONCLUDING THE EVENT

In nearly every case, videoconference events run slightly over schedule. For this reason, it is recommended that you plan to conclude 15 minutes before the scheduled end of your connection time. You will probably find that when you reach the end, those 15 minutes will have mysteriously disappeared! And, even if you have a highly organized event and conclude exactly when you thought you would, you can use the extra bit of time to thank everyone for attending or to address one last important question.

FOR MORE HELP

For more help, or to contact a technician who can assist you with arrangements in the Capitol Complex, contact Facilities Services at **(208) 332-1935**, or write to **dfoster@adm.state.id.us**.